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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of National Estimates

18 May 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: The Political Outlook in Pakistan*

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The dominant position of Iskander Mirza in Pakistan is now confronted with the most severe challenge since late 1954. Mirza has responded energetically to the challenge and will probably succeed in defeating it, possibly through a deal with H. S. Suhrawardy. Internal developments will probably not produce greatly different foreign policies in the near future, and we believe the basic conclusions of NIE 52-55 to be still generally valid. However, we recognize the desirability of having a new coordinated estimate of the Pakistani situation, taking account of developments over the last fourteen months, and therefore recommend the initiation of a revision of NIE 52-55 for IAC consideration in early August. This would come after the immediate political crisis had been resolved but before the national legislative assembly is scheduled to reconvene.

DISCUSSION

1. In estimating probable developments in Pakistan last spring** we concluded that while the ruling clique (then headed

* This memorandum has been coordinated with DD/P and OCI but not with the IAC agencies.

** NIE 52-55, "Probable Developments in Pakistan," 15 March 1955.

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by Governor-General Ghulam Mohammed) would remain in power at least through 1955 and probably considerably longer, it would probably be handicapped by a continuing lack of organized political and popular support and by the thinness of its top leadership. In these circumstances, we indicated, the ruling clique would have to rely on widely disparate and in many cases antagonistic individuals and groups for effective execution of its policies. Political lines would remain "loosely drawn and subject to quick opportunistic changes." The death or incapacitation of Ghulam Mohammed would "severely test the ability" of his principal collaborators to keep their political associates in line and their opponents under control.

2. This assessment has been amply borne out in the last fourteen months. Iskander Mirza succeeded the ailing Ghulam Mohammed as Governor-General last fall and became Pakistan's first president on adoption of the new constitution in March 1956. Although he is still Pakistan's dominant figure, along with General Ayub, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Mirza's lack of organized support has involved him in a long series of political and constitutional crises and compromises. The central government at Karachi, though headed by an essentially non-political career administrator, Chaudri Mohammed Ali, depends for parliamentary support on a coalition embracing the old and largely unregenerate Moslem League, which Mirza distrusts, and the United Front, a loosely organized and unreliable body which decisively defeated the Moslem League in the 1954 East Pakistan elections.

3. Mirza is now confronted with the most severe challenge since late 1954. In West Pakistan a powerful coterie of old-line Moslem League politicians, most of them long opposed to the present ruling group, has revolted against Mirza's personal choice as provincial chief minister -- the widely respected independent, Dr. Khan Sahib -- with the ultimate intention of upsetting Mirza himself. The situation is complicated by the fact that the inept


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United Front cabinet in East Pakistan, whose party is a major element in the present central government coalition, is now facing growing local opposition. These political tensions, which have probably been exacerbated by the emotional strains of Ramadan, the month-long Moslem period of fasting which has just ended, will come to a head when the two provincial legislatures meet, the West Pakistan group on 19 May and the East Pakistanis on 22 May.

4. However, Mirza has responded energetically to the present challenge and will probably succeed in defeating it. Although himself still nominally a member of the Moslem League, he has encouraged the establishment by Khan Sahib and West Pakistan Governor Gurmani of a new group, the Republican Party, to compete with the Moslem League. At the same time, Mirza is clearly working toward a deal with H. S. Suhrawardy, the able but highly ambitious and opportunistic leader of the opposition Awami League, which holds what may prove to be the balance of power in the central legislature and is the leading element in the growing opposition to the United Front Cabinet in East Pakistan.



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5. It is still uncertain whether the Republican Party, despite its considerable success to date in winning over West Pakistan Moslem Leaguers, will be justified in its claims that it has

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enough votes to command a majority when the provincial legislature opens. Even if it fails to do so, however, Mirza will be in a strong position to intervene personally at the provincial capital of Lahore to impose a compromise settlement with the opposition.

6. In the unlikely event that Mirza's present maneuvers to check the West Pakistan opposition fail, Mirza would probably be prepared as a last resort to dismiss the provincial legislature and impose governor's rule there. Such a move would represent a setback for the democratic process and, if it were not to be a completely arbitrary proceeding, would under the new constitution have to be confirmed by the national legislative assembly when it reconvenes in the fall. However, the bulk of the Pakistani population probably continues to be cynical or apathetic about politics and professional politicians and would probably not resist governor's rule. Mirza's supporters already claim the support of more than half the West Pakistan members of the national legislature, and with the aid of the United Front -- or more probably the Suhrawardy following -- will probably be able to meet any legislative test of governor's rule.

7. The most serious aspect of the situation is contained in rumors of a split between Mirza and General Ayub, whose control of the armed forces makes him the mainstay of the regime.

However, it still appears highly unlikely that Ayub, a professional military man who has hitherto shown considerable distaste for partisan politics and politicians, would engage in activities which seriously jeopardized Mirza's position or otherwise threatened the stability of the regime.

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8. Provided that Ayub and the military remain on Mirza's side, we continue to believe that the latter will remain the dominant factor in the Pakistani government. Despite his current difficulties, Mirza will probably be in a better position to build up a reliable political machine now that he has in effect been forced to complete the long-developing break with the old-line Moslem League leadership. Should he make a deal with Suhrawardy, a number of the government's most pressing political difficulties will probably be eliminated for the immediate future. In particular, the necessity of playing along with the United Front will probably disappear.

9. Nevertheless, the elevation of Suhrawardy to the premiership would create some problems for Mirza and possibly also to some degree for the US. While Suhrawardy is an extremely able parliamentarian and perhaps the only political figure in Pakistan who shows any promise of achieving a national popular following, he has a well-established reputation for opportunism and has never gotten along well with Mirza. He will almost certainly be a far more independent-minded prime minister than the present incumbent, particularly since he does not share Mirza's belief in the overriding importance of maintaining internal stability even at the expense of faster progress toward genuine democracy and is probably somewhat less convinced than the president of the importance of the military aid program and of close cooperation with the US. Although some members of Suhrawardy's party have strongly leftist ties, however, there is little indication that Suhrawardy would favor domestic or foreign policies greatly different from those now in effect.

10. In any event, moreover, Pakistan's ability to overcome the inherent differences between the two geographically separated sections of the country and to develop a stable political system capable of functioning effectively in a genuinely democratic fashion will remain uncertain for many years to come. Until Pakistan's political parties and leaders develop a greater sense

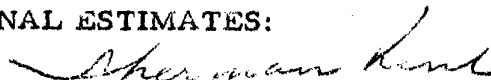
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of responsibility and the respect and confidence of the people, Pakistan will continue to be faced with recurrent political crises and the future of its present constitutional experiment will remain in doubt.

11. The frustration engendered by Pakistan's inability to resolve outstanding differences with its neighbors will probably continue to contribute to internal political tensions. Pakistan will probably continue to have a marked inferiority complex vis-a-vis India and a strong sense of resentment over Afghanistan's continued pursuit of the Pushtunistan campaign. These factors will probably continue to be reflected in irritation over Western failure to support Pakistan's cause more firmly and in recurrent misgivings over the value of Pakistan's Western ties. Should the US and UK, in the face of continuing Bloc gestures of friendship, fail to demonstrate continuing interest in strengthening Pakistan as an ally, the neutralist feeling which welled up prior to the recent Baghdad Pact meeting would become a serious political factor.

12. However, most Pakistani leaders recognize the need for strong Western friends and, while they will press hard for Western backing when they re-raise the Kashmir issue at the UN this fall, probably recognize the unlikelihood of obtaining unequivocal US and UK support in their quarrels with India and Afghanistan. Moreover, we consider it highly unlikely that Pakistan will itself attempt to resolve these issues by force. Despite any temptation Pakistani leaders might have to win popular favor by a show of greater militancy vis-a-vis India, we believe that they are not prepared to accept the military and diplomatic risks of a deliberate showdown with India's far larger military forces. Except in the unlikely event of a sufficient serious deterioration of relations with India to produce a major upsurge of popular emotions, we also consider it highly unlikely that the Pakistani government would be forced into a war policy. It is also unlikely that Pakistan would undertake major military or guerrilla action to eliminate the Pushtunistan problem.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



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